

# Chaco Road Impact Study Flounders in Confusion and Challenge

The Environmental Assessment (EA) being conducted on CR7950, the primary access road to Chaco Culture National Historical Park, has drawn criticism from many groups as well as from Katherine Slick, New Mexico State Historic Preservation Officer. After a third meeting in Aztec on February 12, Ms. Slick expressed concern that the purpose and need were still “not well articulated”; that the proponents’ involvement seemed “weak or vague”; and that the process described by the consultants hired by San Juan County, URS Corp. and Taschek Environmental, was not clear “in letting people know what was being requested.” Critics of the EA process cite a number of examples. Preliminary documents furnished by URS indicate that the purpose and need for the road improvements are to create better access for the local population and to fix a hazardous road. Undeniably, local Navajo, like many Native Americans, deserve easier lives, but URS itself claims that 90% of the traffic on CR7950 goes to Chaco, and is not local. In addition, all evidence suggests that the community serviced by CR7950 is very small. To date, URS and Taschek have not answered requests for population data. Whether the road poses a liability for San Juan County has also not been established. No statistics supporting any fatal or even serious accidents have been presented. Undocumented accounts point to the regrettable death of one cow. The County admits there has never been scheduled maintenance but does not accept maintenance as an alternative. Paving the road



Chaco ruins (Copyright 2007 O.P.M.)

will only make the road more dangerous by increasing speed and visitation.

The URS Corp. handout attempting to predict visitation increase brought about by road improvements provides more controversy. URS graphs suggest a modest increase in visitation, contradicting the National Park Service (NPS) 2005 Transportation Study by Jonathan Upchurch, which suggests potential, fivefold increases. URS rejects the NPS study without providing comment. Common sense suggests that the visitation at Chaco might well match Mesa Verde’s, jumping to over 500,000 per year in several years.

Representative Tom Udall earmarked the original \$800,000 to improve the Chaco road. Many insiders contend that he now regrets that decision. San Juan County has approached him asking for \$1,000,000 more of taxpayer money to complete the project. Please contact Rep. Udall (see page 3) and urge him to direct the use of the existing funds into improvements other than paving, and to grant no more earmarks. In an election year, he does not need more association with this project. Not only does the project face growing challenges and questions about energy interests near Chaco, but there is a Pandora’s box of legal questions for San Juan County about the paving of the first three miles. Those questions have not been forgotten by the Hopi or by concerned groups. It may only be a matter of time before the box is opened farther. For email addresses and information about how to participate and help preserve this pristine World Heritage Site, visit the Chaco Alliance at [www.dont-pave-chaco.com](http://www.dont-pave-chaco.com), or the San Juan Citizens Alliance at [www.sanjuancitizens.org](http://www.sanjuancitizens.org). Thanks for the continued support.

—Anson Wright, Chaco Alliance



Explore, enjoy and protect the planet

Not everyone can make a large gift to protect the environment during their lifetime, but you can preserve the environment for generations to come by remembering Sierra Club in your will.

There are many gift options available. We can even help you plan a gift for your local Chapter.

**For more information and confidential assistance, please contact:**  
 Gift Planning Program  
 (800) 932-4270  
[planned.giving@sierraclub.org](mailto:planned.giving@sierraclub.org)

Preserve the Future

## To Contribute to the Rio Grande Sierran

The *Rio Grande Sierran* is published six times a year – early January, March, May, July, September, and November – by the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club as a benefit for members living in New Mexico and West Texas. The opinions expressed in signed articles in the *Rio Grande Sierran* are the opinions of the writers and not necessarily those of the Sierra Club. Articles may be freely reprinted for nonprofit purposes, provided that credit is given to the author and the *Rio Grande Sierran*. (Please let us know if you reprint.) Products and services advertised in the *Rio Grande Sierran* are not necessarily endorsed by the Sierra Club.

Contributions – articles, photos, artwork, poems, letters to the editor, paid advertisements – are welcome. Send to the editor (see masthead page 2). Submissions by Rio Grande Chapter members will take precedence over others. Articles are subject to abridgement. Letters to the editor may be up to 500 words. The contributor’s name and email address will be printed as a source of more information, unless the contributor specifies otherwise.

Submissions must be received by the 10th of the month prior to publication. Editorial practices as developed and adopted by the Rio Grande Chapter will be used in production of the *Rio Grande Sierran*. Contents of the Group pages are the responsibility of the editor for that Group and any policies that are in place from that Group.

Nonmember subscriptions are \$10 per year. Send checks to Cliff Larsen, 824 Los Lovatos Road, Santa Fe, NM 87501. Please allow eight weeks for processing.

Extra copies are often available. Please contact the editor (see masthead page 2) or the Group Chair in your area (see Group pages).

## Join us!

Sign up online  
[www.sierraclub.org/membership](http://www.sierraclub.org/membership)  
 or return this form:

My Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Check enclosed, made payable to:

Sierra Club  
 P.O. Box 52968  
 Boulder, CO 80322-2968

Please charge my  Mastercard  VISA

Cardholder’s Name \_\_\_\_\_

Card Number \_\_\_\_\_

Exp. Date \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ 1700

### MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

|                | INDIVIDUAL                       | JOINT                            |
|----------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| INTRODUCTORY   | <input type="checkbox"/> \$25    |                                  |
| REGULAR        | <input type="checkbox"/> \$39    | <input type="checkbox"/> \$49    |
| SUPPORTING     | <input type="checkbox"/> \$75    | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100   |
| CONTRIBUTING   | <input type="checkbox"/> \$150   | <input type="checkbox"/> \$175   |
| LIFE           | <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,250 |
| SENIOR         | <input type="checkbox"/> \$25    | <input type="checkbox"/> \$35    |
| STUDENT        | <input type="checkbox"/> \$25    | <input type="checkbox"/> \$35    |
| LIMITED INCOME | <input type="checkbox"/> \$25    | <input type="checkbox"/> \$35    |

Contributions, gifts, and dues to the Sierra Club are not tax-deductible; they support our effective, citizen-based advocacy and lobbying efforts. Your dues include \$7.50 for a subscription to *Sierra* magazine and \$1 for your Chapter newsletter.